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INTRODUCTION OF A RESOLUTION
CALLING ON THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION COALITION TO OUTLINE
PLAN FOR INCLUSION OF MINORITIES

HON. JAMES P. MORAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 17, 2013

Mr. MORAN. Mr. Speaker, the horror unleashed by the regime of Bashar al Assad in Syria has caused tremendous suffering, displacement and death. Tragically, this conflict may endure for months to come. Assad has lost legitimacy with his own people and with the world, but he retains the military capacity to keep fighting. The fact that he retains chemical weapons and, as the Administration has averred, may have already used them on the battlefield, raises new concerns about the toll this conflict may yet take.

Mr. Speaker, we all are aware of the delicate mix of religious and cultural diversity that exists in Syria. That harmony persisted even when sectarian conflict—fomented in part by Bashar al Assad and his father Hafez before him—overwhelmed Syria's neighbors in Lebanon and Iraq. But in Syria, a delicate ethnic and religious balance held.

Now, however, it is becoming increasingly clear that Assad believes his best hope lies in shattering that harmony. He hopes that the atrocities committed by the shabiha, paramilitary gangs mostly drawn from Assad's own Alawite community, will implicate all of Syria's 2.3 million Alawites and bind their future to his.

This horrific strategy was recently employed on May 2 in the small, coastal village of Bayda. Assad's soldiers, accompanied by elements of shabiha, entered the mainly Sunni town and slaughtered scores of men, women and children.

By carrying out massacres like the one in Bayda, the regime hopes that Alawites, as well as other minorities seen as dependent on Assad's protection, will be inexorably tied to the regime. He hopes that his genocidal actions will lead to calls for revenge and, ultimately, to unbridled sectarian conflict. He will then claim to be the only power that can control the resulting chaos. This is the gamble of a desperate ruler, and we have to do what we can to frustrate his plan. In reality, those in Bashar al Assad's inner circle know he is steadily losing the support of Syria's people—including Alawites. We should encourage the opposition to accelerate that trend, and reach out to Syria's people with a vision of unity, peace and citizenship for all.

That is why I am introducing a resolution today calling on the Syrian Opposition Coalition to publicly outline a detailed vision of inclusion for all of Syria's people, including a guarantee that all Syrians—Alawites and others, will participate as equals in any new Syrian government. Such a statement, along with meaningful progress towards establishing institutions of transitional justice, will instill con-

fidence among Syria's minorities, and help peel more Syrians away from the regime.

This revolution started as a peaceful and inclusive movement calling for an end to the undemocratic and corrupt system of government controlled by Assad. That is why many Alawites are already participating in the opposition. They can see a better future for Syria. We should encourage the opposition to make concrete that pluralistic, democratic vision.

INTRODUCTION OF A RESOLUTION
SUPPORTING THE GOALS AND
IDEALS OF NATIONAL ASIAN
AND PACIFIC ISLANDER HIV/
AIDS AWARENESS DAY

HON. MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO

OF GUAM

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 17, 2013

Ms. BORDALLO. Mr. Speaker, today I have reintroduced a resolution to honor the memory of 3,542 Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders we have lost to AIDS, and to recognize the 9,317 whom are still living with HIV/AIDS the United States. It supports the goals and ideals of National Asian and Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, its observance, and, draws attention to the stigma and disparities that hinder proper treatment and prevention within these communities.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders comprise more than 40 different ethnic subgroups, speaking more than 100 languages and dialects. This resolution recognizes the importance of providing access to culturally- and linguistically- competent services, especially HIV testing. According to an analysis of data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were the only racial/ethnic groups with a statistically significant increase in new HIV diagnoses. The CDC estimates that 37 percent of the HIV diagnoses among these communities progress to AIDS in less than 12 months. Additionally, the CDC estimates that 1 in 3 Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders living with HIV/AIDS are unaware they are infected.

Yet, with increasing rates of infection, they continue to have the lowest rates of access to HIV-testing services. Although there are a number of factors that contribute to increasing rates of infections, stigma and discrimination associated with an HIV/AIDS has proved to be a leading factor in low testing rates and increased risk-taking behaviors.

The observance of National Asian and Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day was established by the Banyan Tree Project, and began as a national campaign to raise awareness of the impact of the HIV/AIDS-related stigma and how it contributes to lower testing rates and greater risk-taking behaviors. Additionally, the work continues with the Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum who have worked nationally for more than 20 years, including in my home district of Guam, in helping to strengthen community-based organizations and programs responding to HIV/AIDS among Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in addressing this need and advancing the

larger cause of reducing HIV/AIDS-related stigmas and disparities in access to HIV prevention, testing and treatment. I would like to thank my colleagues, Congressman BERA, Congresswoman CHRISTENSEN, Congresswoman CHU, Congressman FALEOMAVAEGA, Congressman GRIJALVA, Congressman HIMES, Congresswoman LEE, Congressman LOWENTHAL, Congresswoman MCCOLLUM, Congressman SCOTT PETERS, Congressman PIERLUISI, Congressman RANGEL, Congressman SABLAN, Congressman ADAM SMITH, Congresswoman SPEIER, and Congressman TAKANO, for their support as original co-sponsors of this resolution.

TRIBUTE TO HOWARD BROOKS

HON. JON RUNYAN

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 17, 2013

Mr. RUNYAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to a true American hero, Mr. Howard Brooks. Mr. Brooks is a constituent of New Jersey's Third Congressional District, and I thank him for his courageous and dedicated service to our nation.

Howard Brooks, born and raised in Eastern Tennessee, joined the Navy on September 3, 1939, the very same day Hitler invaded Poland. Mr. Brooks was serving as a 3rd class electrician's mate on the heavy cruiser USS *Houston* when it was sunk by a Japanese battle fleet in the Battle of Sunda Strait.

After receiving orders to abandon ship, he spent three days in the water before his life raft washed ashore, where he and fellow survivors were captured by the Japanese. Mr. Brooks spent 3½ years as a prisoner of war, and was among those forced to build the Burma Railway. Of the 1,068 crewmen, he was among just 291 sailors who survived the sinking of the USS *Houston* and the years of brutal captivity that followed.

After the war ended and Mr. Brooks returned home, he graduated from the University of Rhode Island in 1952. He retired from his career as an electrical engineer in 1981. He has been married for over forty years, and has two sons. Just last year, on the 70th anniversary of the sinking of the USS *Houston*, Mr. Brooks attended a memorial service in Sam Houston Park, Houston, Texas.

At 93 years old, Mr. Howard Brooks continues to serve our nation by sharing his life's story, and ensuring that this time in our country's history is never forgotten. His valiant and courageous service to our country deserves our nation's deepest gratitude.

It is my honor to represent Mr. Howard Brooks in the House of Representatives. It is an even greater honor to have this opportunity to publicly thank him for his dedicated and courageous service to our nation.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. TOM COLE

OF OKLAHOMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 17, 2013

Mr. COLE. Mr. Speaker, I was unavoidably detained and missed rollcall No. 152 and No.

153. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye" on rollcall No. 152 and "nay" on rollcall No. 153.

PLEBISCITES ON THE STATEHOOD QUESTION FOR PUERTO RICO

HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR.

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, May 17, 2013

Mr. DUNCAN of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I have had the privilege to visit Puerto Rico three times over the years and have enjoyed many visits and meetings with citizens and officials of Puerto Rico when they have come to Washington. I believe that Puerto Rico is a beautiful island, but more importantly it has many wonderful people.

I have been involved in the issue of statehood for Puerto Rico for many years. While I love Puerto Rico and its people, I do not believe any place should become another state unless an overwhelming majority of its citizens support statehood. This is certainly not the case in Puerto Rico at this time. In fact, support for statehood in Puerto Rico has consistently remained at around less than half the population.

I appreciate very much the contributions of Puerto Rico and its citizens to our Country, and I especially admire and respect the service of many Puerto Ricans in the U.S. military.

I hope that the U.S. and Puerto Rico continue to have the closest possible ties. When the economy of Puerto Rico is strong, trade with the U.S. increases creating jobs in both places. What is good for the U.S. is generally also good for Puerto Rico, and vice versa.

I am always willing to consider and occasionally even support the right of the citizens of Puerto Rico to have referenda or plebiscites on the statehood question. It would be foolish and too expensive to have such a vote every year, but certainly I would not object to having such a vote once every few years.

However, my main goal would be to make sure that such a plebiscite be conducted in the fairest way possible. I, and many, many others, felt that the most recent plebiscite was skewed in a way to tilt the election toward statehood.

Now, I am told both the House of Representatives and Senate of Puerto Rico have passed a resolution stating that the plebiscite held on November 6, 2012 portrayed a false majority in favor of statehood and prevented an accurate vote on the option of commonwealth status.

I want to make absolutely sure that any future plebiscite on the question of statehood be conducted in the fairest way possible and certainly not in a way biased toward any particular outcome.

I want to help do everything possible so that everyone can work together to help foster economic growth for those of us in the 50 states, as well as for our friends, the citizens of Puerto Rico.

THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF PUERTO RICO COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO

THE CAPITOL

WE, EDUARDO BHATIA-GAUTIER, PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, AND JAIME R. PERELLÓ-BORRÁS, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

CERTIFY

That the Senate of Puerto Rico and the House of Representatives of Puerto Rico approved in final vote Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 24, introduced by Messrs. Nadal-Power and Rosa-Rodríguez and Co-sponsors Messrs. Fas-Alzamora, Tirado-Rivera, Bhatia-Gautier, Dalmau-Santiago, Torres-Torres; Mmes. López-León, González-López; Messrs. Nieves-Pérez, Pereira-Castillo, Rivera-Filomeno, Rodríguez-González, Rodríguez-Otero, Rodríguez-Valle, Ruiz-Nieves, Suárez-Cáceres, and Vargas-Morales and that the same reads as follows:

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

To inform the President and the Congress of the United States on the results of the plebiscite held on November 6, 2012, and support the request of the President of the United States of America for Congress to appropriate \$2.5 million for the State Elections Commission of Puerto Rico for a congressionally-sponsored plebiscite after conducting the appropriate voter education campaign, which incorporates all options, including the enhanced Commonwealth, based on the principles of fairness and equality; to authorize the disbursement of funds; and for other purposes.

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

On November 6, 2012 a plebiscite was held in Puerto Rico along with the general elections. The results of such plebiscite were inconclusive because none of the options on Puerto Rico's political status received a majority of the votes. Said plebiscite consisted of two separate questions, formulated by the preceding pro-statehood government administration, which favored statehood for Puerto Rico, in order to portray a false majority in favor of statehood and prevent such formula from competing against the Commonwealth option, which had been favored by the people of Puerto Rico in all previously-held plebiscites.

The results were the following: to the first question which asked voters whether or not Puerto Rico should maintain its current form of political status, nine hundred seventy thousand nine hundred ten (970,910), that is, fifty-one point seven percent (51.7%) of the people voted "NO"; whereas eight hundred twenty-eight thousand seventy-seven (828,077), that is, forty-four point one percent (44.1%) of the people voted "YES." However, a total of sixty-seven thousand two hundred sixty-seven (67,267) voters cast a blank ballot, which accounted for three point six percent (3.6%) of voters.

The second question asked voters to choose from options that excluded the current political status. Statehood received eight hundred thirty-four thousand one hundred ninety-one (834,191), or forty-four point four percent (44.4%) of the votes cast; Sovereign Free Associated State received four hundred fifty-four thousand seven hundred sixty-eight (454,768), or twenty-four point three percent (24.3%) of the votes cast; and Independence received seventy four thousand eight hundred ninety-five (74,895), or four percent (4%) of the votes cast. However, this second question received a total of four hundred ninety-eight thousand six hundred four (498,604) blank votes, which accounted for twenty-six point five percent (26.5%) of the votes cast. These results should not surprise us, since the pre-

ceding Legislative Assembly approved the plebiscite disregarding the procedural and substantive consensus required to legitimize any plebiscite held.

The Party that supported the Commonwealth option, which was the political opposition at the time, objected this process arguing that it was contrary to the provisions of H.R. 2499, as amended and approved by the United States House of Representatives, which included the Commonwealth among the options in the second question. Moreover, it stated that the process had also been criticized by the White House because it was designed with the intent to conceal the true expression of the people of Puerto Rico.

Commonwealth supporters employed two methods to express their opposition to the plebiscite as designed. On the one hand, the Governing Board of the Party supporting the Commonwealth option adopted a resolution asking voters to protest the process by casting a blank ballot. On the other hand, a significant number of pro-Commonwealth leaders openly conducted campaigns in favor of the Sovereign Free Associated State option.

There is no doubt that the voters who wish to express their dissatisfaction with the proposals or the candidates in a ballot, traditionally do so by spoiling their ballots, casting a blank ballot, or voting for a fictional character.

If the United States Congress wants to know the amount of Puerto Rican voters against statehood for Puerto Rico, the blank ballots should be taken into account because such votes clearly express the intent of voters not favoring that option. Thus, it should be understood that votes cast in favor of statehood did not exceed forty-four point four percent (44.4%), which shows a two percent (2%) decrease in the historical peak such option achieved in 1998. In other words, fifty-five point six percent (55.6%) of Puerto Rican voters rejected Statehood in the 2012 plebiscite.

In 1998, the pro-statehood party had also designed a unilateral and exclusionary plebiscite; nonetheless, voters had the option to vote for "None of the Above." The "None of the Above" option received fifty point three percent (50.3%) of the votes cast, followed by Statehood and Independence, which received forty-six point five percent (46.5%) and two point five percent (2.5%) of the votes cast, respectively. The results of the 1998 plebiscite were consistent with those of the 1993 plebiscite, in which the Commonwealth option received forty-eight point six percent (48.6%) of the votes cast, whereas Statehood and Independence received forty-six point three percent (46.3%) and four point four percent (4.4%) of the votes cast, respectively. The only other event of this kind held since the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952, took place in 1967. In the 1967 plebiscite, the Commonwealth received sixty point three percent (60.3%) of the votes cast, while Statehood received thirty-nine percent (39%).

Unfortunately, the preceding government administration in Puerto Rico whose term ended in December 2012, failed to sponsor a process that included the recommendations of the Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status appointed by President Barack Obama. Such Task Force proposed—on the Report released in March 2011—various methods to ask Puerto Ricans about their political status in a manner that is fair for the supporters of all options. Furthermore, the preceding government administration missed the opportunity to address the issue of Puerto Rico's political status in an inclusive and responsible manner.

On April 10, 2013, President Barack Obama included in the budget proposal for the Fiscal Year 2014, an appropriation of \$2.5 million